

Coronado National Forest

Border Fire Response Protocol

PURPOSE: The Forest is dedicated to safe and efficient initial attack on wildfires that require suppression. An intricate element in this efficiency is the Forest's mission to dispatch the closest available resources. Critical to the safety of the firefighters in initial attack on fires in the area of the international border, is the sharing of intelligence and having a standard set of protocols that may be implemented to reduce risk. The following *Border Fire Response Protocol* attempts to collect and distribute current information and procedures, in an effort to enhance firefighter safety and situation awareness in and around the fire environment near the international border. This set of protocols is intended as guidance for fires reported in the "A" Attentive Risk Zone as indicated on the Coronado NF *International Border Watchouts* pocket card. However, discretion in their application may be exercised by any member of the Forest's Fire Management Program or Line Officers.

These protocols may be considered in the planning and implementation of prescribed fire on the Forest if they have potential application.

PROTOCOL RESPONSIBILITIES:

Fire Management Program

- Ensure all firefighters, locals and guests, have in their possession, the Coronado NF *International Border Watchouts* pocket card.
- Forest and District Fire Management should seek periodic updates on law enforcement activity, concerns, and special emphasis projects. Special effort should be made in the late spring of each year for a preseason update from Forest Service LE&I and U.S. Customs and Border Patrol. District Fire Management is encouraged to meet with local U.S. Customs and Border Patrol officials in the spring of every year to discuss the upcoming fire season and security issues.
- Daily fire season briefings should include updates as acquired, periodic review of the *International Border Watchouts* card, and this Initial Attack Protocol.
- This protocol is to be shared with all fire fighters on the Forest, including detailed resources or individuals, severity resources, and resources otherwise assigned to the Coronado. Ensure any District-specific policies or protocols that are not covered here, are made known.
- Forest and District Fire Management must be familiar with the annual operating plan and cooperative agreement with Mexico for initial attack assistance. District FMOs and Line Officers will ensure each qualified incident commander on the districts is familiar with this agreement and operating plan.
- For campaign fires or incidents requiring complex and outside management, the Forest and/or District overhead will assist in gaining US Customs & Border Patrol cooperation in incident management, preferably through a Border Patrol liaison available to the management organization.

Tucson Dispatch Center (TDC)

- Follow established and normal procedures for collecting initial information and dispatching resources to a reported fire.
- As requested, place an order for a minimum of one Law Enforcement Officer (LEO) to be assigned to the fire as a security resource for fire fighters; providing deflection and relieving the IC from the distractions associated with border activity. Utilize other agency LEOs when necessary due to unavailability of Forest Service LE. If the order cannot be filled immediately, the IC, FMO, and/or Line Officer has discretion in the decision to commit resources to the incident. This security LEO order is the priority over an order for a Fire Investigator. Utilizing the same officer in both roles is at the discretion of the IC and the first LEO on scene.
- Initiate “Ground Deconfliction” procedures. This entails contacting US Customs & Border Protection Tucson Sector Office and local US Forest Service Patrol Captain or Special Agent (and other agencies as determined) to notify of the fire’s location and seek information regarding any law enforcement or known illegal activity of concern in the area.
- Report intelligence gathered from “Ground Deconfliction” to Incident Commander or first resource on scene, as well as the reporting Law Enforcement Officer. Follow-up with the IC and others is vital if not all positions are assigned or on scene when “Ground Deconfliction” is accomplished.
- Dispatchers will be familiar with the annual operating plan and cooperative agreement with Mexico for initial attack assistance. The plan and all contact names and numbers will be readily available in the dispatch office. As requested by the IC or other District or Forest Leadership, the TDC will immediately make the appropriate contacts and obtain the appropriate permissions according to the operating plan and agreement.
- If aircraft are assigned to the fire, ensure pilots are notified to attempt to contact other aircraft that may be in the area of the incident. Utilize the rotor-wing deconfliction air-to-air frequency, 123.025
- If night operations exist or if personnel rest over night (RON) on the fire scene, ensure the dispatch office is staffed accordingly. Prompt the IC for this information/decision if necessary.
- If TDC is notified of any incident or field personnel encountering a deceased individual or human remains (not associated with incident activity nor associated with an FS employee accident; there is other appropriate protocol in such cases), TDC will contact Coronado LE & I and the local County Sherriff’s Office.

Initial Attack Resources and District Fire Management Operations

- District overhead in conjunction with the IC should determine the appropriate level of suppression response. Initial dispatch of resources will be guided by the established matrix, but adjustments can be made based on the assessment by the IC and District Fire Management. This decision is to be based on the values at risk; the resources available; and the level of security needed and/or risk in the fire area. The availability of LEO security should also be factored into the decision to commit resources.

- Dispatched/assigned resources should implement “Ground Follow” procedures. Such procedures are an enhancement of current normal communication procedures:
 - √ Ensure acknowledgement of dispatch to the incident by the assigned resource.
 - √ While en route to the incident, keep TDC informed of your current location and direction of travel as noted by landmarks and/or major intersections with the Forest roads system. This will also help to establish the best route into the scene for other resources.
 - √ Ensure each resource checks in with the IC and/or notifies TDC of being “on-scene.”
 - √ IC should maintain regular and periodic contact with TDC, reporting status updates for the duration of the incident.
 - √ Ensure each resource and/or the IC, notifies TDC as resources leave the scene.
 - √ Ensure all resources checkout with TDC, no sooner than they are parked back at the duty station.
- Make any/all reasonable attempts to scout the area for any persons who might be unaware of the fire or might be in harm’s way.
- If a helicopter is dispatched to the incident, the helitack supervisor on board may consider using the aircraft to do a thorough reconnaissance of the area to increase the situation awareness for potential risk or suspicious activity. Care should be taken to keep this recon flight at a normal altitude expected over a fire so as not to be mistaken as having any other mission. Any suspicious activity or persons observed by this recon should be reported immediately. The helitack supervisor on board has complete discretion and authority to not engage the fire if there is any concern or until the situation can be mitigated.
- All personnel on scene share the responsibility with pilots to keep a watch for other low flying aircraft in the vicinity of the fire. Ensure pilots are monitoring any necessary air-to-air frequencies and ground personnel have the “Air Guard” frequency programmed into all radios.
- Consider sweeping an area or utilizing an aircraft to recon an area prior to any large firing operations.
- Look for opportunities to post an additional security lookout on scene, in addition to any needed fire lookout. This suggestion is in addition to the LEO assigned and this individual should stay in proximity of the rest of the fire fighters. Aircraft over the fire for extended periods of time may be utilized to augment the need for monitoring the area surrounding the fire, so long as this effort does not interfere with the pilot’s attention to the current mission.
- Work in pairs whenever possible, including travel to and from border fires and on-scene tasks.
- Make all possible attempts to ensure that LEO personnel are not mistaken as a firefighters, and also ensure that no firefighter and/or fire vehicle can be mistaken as an LE vehicle. If the LEO’s location on scene requires nomex PPE, LE will make attempts to utilize nomex other than the traditional yellow. The Forest has acquired and made available, beige nomex shirts with “POLICE” marked on the back and FS LE Shields on the shoulder.

- If an LEO is required and/or requested for security (deflection) on a fire incident, the policy within the Interagency Fire & Aviation Operations Guide (Red Book) governing unescorted visits to the fire line will be applied. The officer must meet the standards to be on the line unescorted; basic fire training, annual refresher, PPE, radio equipment, and the light pack test (or LE&I equivalent physical test).
- Have alternative communications tools available on scene such as cellular and satellite phones.
- The IC, in consort with the District Line Officer, FMO, and/or Forest Fire Staff will determine the need for action across the U.S.-Mexico border. If action is determined necessary within the bounds of the cooperative agreement, the IC will notify TDC immediately to make the appropriate contacts and obtain the appropriate permissions.
- Nighttime operations or RON on scene of a border fire requires some additional mitigation and review of options.
 - √ Consider leaving the scene and returning home for the night, if the IC is comfortable with containment and the fire perimeter is secure.
 - √ Consider leaving the scene ONLY if fatigue is not a factor. The IC and if possible, the Line Officer should consider border security concerns in conjunction with the impact of fatigue caused by traveling home. Rely on risk management strategies to balance fatigue, travel, fire containment, and border security.
 - √ If taking action across the international border, make all possible attempts in strategy to return to the U.S. side of the border before dark.
 - √ If the need to RON on scene is determined, keep all personnel in one group and in one location. Ensure that the LEO security position has been filled and/or adequate LEO relief is on scene if personnel are going to RON on scene. Give ample notice and ensure that overnight dispatch operations are in place when no other form of communication is available or when suppression efforts and/or work is to be performed over night.
 - √ All attempts should be made to move rotor-winged aircraft into secure airports or facilities if not released from the fire over night.
- If a person(s) in distress is encountered, personnel may use discretion in offering critical first aid or other assistance. However, diligence and good situation awareness should be ahead of any decision to offer assistance to another unknown party. Ensure your own safety and scan your surroundings before stopping your vehicle or approaching an unknown party. Regardless if aid was offered to or accepted by the party in distress, the location and other information must be relayed to the appropriate law enforcement agency through TDC immediately.
- In the unfortunate event that personnel encounter a deceased person or any human remains (not associated with incident activity nor associated with an FS employee accident; there is other appropriate protocol in such cases), notify TDC immediately. If not done through TDC, ensure that Coronado LE & I and the local County Sheriff's office is notified.
- Watch for "copy cat" vehicles. Illegal activity along the border has involved vehicles painted to look like Forest Service or other agency vehicles. Take note of anything out of the ordinary, including any drivers you do not recognize. Pay special attention to the small details on vehicle paint schemes, door shields, license plates, uniforms, and unit numbering.

Maintain safety in all actions and observations. Expect to be stopped by other Law Enforcement, have ID and wear uniform, Coronado fire T-shirts, or fire PPE components. Be polite and cooperative if you find yourself stopped by one of our fellow LE agencies.

- All drivers and passengers in motor vehicles should ensure constant alertness and maintain defensive driving habits. Vehicles traveling at excessive speeds are a common occurrence as associated with illegal activity, law enforcement pursuits, or irresponsible forest visitors.
- Incident Management Teams hosted on the Forest should refer to these protocols as guidance for managing large complex incidents along the International Border. Similar mitigations should be put in place for deflection and firefighter security as well as following the reporting and information exchange protocols contained within this document.
- These protocols are dynamic and should be adjusted or updated as needed. Look for opportunities to improve or adjust these protocols through lessons learned and feedback from the field.